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SUBJECT: SLOVAKIA APPROVES NATO REQUEST TO SEND ENGINEERS
TO KANDAHAR

REF: BRATISLAVA 58

¶1. The Slovak Cabinet approved a decision to transfer a maximum of 65 Slovak combat-engineers from Kabul to the airport in Kandahar on February 28. The decision came in response to a request made by NATO last Fall. Slovak soldiers will be sent to Kandahar with the caveat that they not leave the airfield. At the moment Slovakia has 57 soldiers in Afghanistan, only 40 of whom are combat engineers. It is not clear if extra forces will be added ahead of the transfer to Kandahar, which DefMin Kasicky said would be realized before the end of the first half of this year. Contacts at MoD have told us this decision does not require Parliamentary approval.

¶2. President Gasparovic welcomed the Cabinet's decision and called it a proper step. Through his spokesperson, Gasparovic said he supports the decision because "we are members of NATO, and from this flow certain responsibilities." Gasparovic believes the decision shows that Slovakia is a responsible and respectable partner that wants to fulfill its commitments.

SILVERMAN